

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 006532

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2015

TAGS: [PGOV IS ELECTIONS GOI INTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: SHARON, PERETZ TENTATIVELY AGREE ON EARLY ELECTIONS

REF: A. TEL AVIV 6460

[1](#)B. TEL AVIV 6247

Classified By: Political Counselor Norman Olsen for reason 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz and Prime Minister Sharon tentatively agreed November 17 to call for national elections sometime between the end of February and the end of March, with both seeking to capitalize on their current political strength in the polls and move forward with their parties' political agendas. Labor's final position depends on a scheduled November 20 Central Committee vote on whether to leave the coalition. Peretz had earlier warned that unless Sharon agreed to a date for early elections, Labor would quit the coalition, leaving Sharon with a 45-MK minority government and vulnerable to no-confidence motions. In preparation for making good on his threat, Peretz collected on November 14 resignation letters from all Labor Party ministers. In an interview with the daily Yedioth Ahronoth, Sharon acknowledged that Peretz's threat to leave the coalition has spurred him to the conclusion that early elections are best.

[1](#)2. (C) Peretz's announcement, immediately after winning the Labor chairmanship November 9, that he intends for Labor to leave the coalition, mobilized the entire political spectrum to strategize over early elections. Some Knesset factions called emergency meetings and some are discussing party lists. Several opposition parties immediately proposed bills to dissolve the Knesset, but Peretz convinced the bills' sponsors to postpone a preliminary vote until November 21, after his meeting with Sharon. Sharon, meanwhile, is meeting with other party leaders and has not announced officially that early elections will occur. During a Likud faction meeting November 16, Sharon also refrained from addressing whether he will remain in the Likud Party or form a new, centrist party. The prospect of Sharon's departure continues to rattle his Likud colleagues, who recognize that Sharon is a far stronger candidate against any contender -- and especially left-leaner Peretz -- than is Likud leadership contender Bibi Netanyahu. A poll released November 16 shows that Sharon commands a clear lead of 19 points over Netanyahu, despite breaking news November 15 that Sharon's elder son, Omri, a Likud MK, was to plead guilty -- as he did the next day -- to criminal charges for illegally financing his father's 1999 Likud leadership campaign.

[1](#)3. (C) Sharon has so far left unclear whether he is leaving the coalition door slightly ajar to other parties on the chance that a new coalition could govern until regularly scheduled elections in November 2006. Sharon's current strength, both popularly and within his own party, argue for accepting early elections that all indicators show will return Sharon to the premiership for another four-year term. Knesset sources likewise believe that it would be disadvantageous for Shinui and Shas, the next largest parties after Likud and Labor, to join the coalition in the year leading up to elections. On November 15, Peretz elicited a commitment from Shinui Party leader Tommy Lapid that Shinui would support early elections and not join Sharon's coalition when Labor bolts. Shinui MK Chemi Doron predicted to Poloff November 15 that Sharon may even decide to jump the gun and ask President Katsav to dissolve the Knesset before either Labor leaves the coalition or the Knesset votes, possibly on November 21, to dissolve itself. If Katsav approves Sharon's request, and barring the slim possibility that another MK could seek to form a new government, elections would take place in about three months (ref B). Doron noted that Sharon used this course of action in November 2003, when he compelled early elections some two years ahead of schedule.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's  
Classified SIPRNET website.

\*\*\*\*\*  
JONES